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ABSTRACT

The widespread use of drugs among college students, especially freshmen, has been an area of particular concern. This study examined the attitudes and behavior toward drugs of incoming college freshmen (N=364) in 1978 and incoming college freshmen (N=499) in 1988 using a questionnaire format. The results indicated that there was a decline in drug use between 1978 and 1988, paralleling a nationwide trend. There was a significant decline in incidence rates of nine substances over 10 years, as well as an increase in the percentage of students who never used certain substances. Gender differences lessened with only beer and cigarettes in 1978 and beer in 1988 being found significantly different by gender in incidence rate. There were significant differences by gender in 1988 on reasons for not using 12 drugs, but no significant differences in reasons for using drugs. Freshmen in 1988 also appeared more cautious and conservative regarding both use and legalization of certain substances. (ABL)

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FRESHMAN ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOR TOWARD DRUGS:

A COMPARISON BY YEAR AND GENDER

Eric L. Kohatsu and William E. Sedlacek

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SUMMARY

An anonymous questionnaire concerning attitudes and behavior toward drugs was administered to a random sample of 364 incoming freshmen (49% male and 51% female) in 1978, and to 499 (56% male and 44% female) incoming freshmen in 1988. Results of this study indicated a similar pattern of decline in drug use as exhibited nationwide. There was a significant decline in incidence rates of 9 substances over ten years, as well as a greater percentage of students who reported that they have never used certain substances. Gender differences have lessened; only beer and cigarettes in 1978 and beer in 1988 was significantly different by gender in incidence rate. There were significant differences by gender in 1988 on reasons for not using 12 drugs; yet, there were no significant differences on reasons for using drugs. Freshmen in 1988 also appeared more cautious and conservative regarding both use and legalization of certain substances. Other results are presented and implications for student affairs programming are discussed.

Freshman Attitudes and Behavior Toward Drugs: A Comparison by Year and Gender

There have been a number of changes and related problems in the sociopolitical climate of the last decade. Such things as the incidence of AIDS, the increase in the use of certain drugs and drug-related violence, and the rise in Christian fundamentalism and conservatism have become increasingly visible (e.g., Adler et al., 1988; Batchelor, 1988; Braungart & Braungart, 1988; Morin, 1988; Sigelman & Presser, 1988). One of the most important social issues is drug use, since it affects peoples' lives in a variety of ways, and involves men and women from different socioeconomic levels and racial/ethnic groups.

An area of particular concern has been the widespread use of drugs among college students, especially freshmen (e.g., Carter & Sedlacek, 1989; Howard & Sedlacek, 1975; Johnson & Sedlacek, 1979; Sedlacek, 1988). Freshmen merit special attention; as incoming students it is important to assess the attitudes, behaviors, and issues that they bring in with them. Possessing such a knowledge base should enable student affairs professionals to better understand these incoming students, and hopefully, will also facilitate development of programs to work with these issues early on. Overall, it is important to examine this particular population since these students will shortly be in the adult work force, and eventually become the leaders of the country. Therefore, it is essential to solve such problems as drug use before the consequences become too severe.

A rather substantial amount of research has been done on analyzing the trends in the types and frequencies of drugs being used by various populations and over different time periods (e.g., Carter & Sedlacek, 1989; Horowitz & Sedlacek, 1973; Johnson & Sedlacek, 1979; Johnston, O'Malley, & Bachman, 1988; Johnston, O'Malley, & Bachman, in press; Washton & Gold, 1986). Generally, the use of drugs among college students has been on the increase since the early 70s (Fago & Sedlacek, 1975, 1976; Howard & Sedlacek, 1975). In particular, the use of marijuana had the highest frequency and incidence of use among university students (Horowitz & Sedlacek, 1973). Further, freshmen have indicated a high rate of alcohol consumption and cigarette smoking (Fago & Sedlacek, 1975). Nonetheless, more recent studies done in the 1980s have indicated that certain drugs are not increasing in terms of the number of users.

For example, nationwide there was an increase in heroin abusers (non-college students) in the 60s and 70s, but the number of addicts has been consistent and stable over the 10 years preceding 1986 (Kozel & Adams, 1986). Further, the ". . . lifetime (ever used), annual, and past month prevalence trends show a decline or leveling among all age groups . . . " (Kozel & Adams, p. 972). Similarly, a reduction in the use of certain drugs has also been apparent in the college population. Carter and Sedlacek (1989) found that among university freshmen there was a significant decline in the use of 13 drugs, except for speed, heroin, liquor, and cocaine. Further, the same study

provided evidence that the use of marijuana, hashish, and barbiturates had also declined.

In spite of a decline in the use of several drugs, others have increasingly higher rates of incidence. For instance, the use of speed and cocaine have gone up (Adams, Gfroerer, Rouse, & Kozel, 1986; Carter & Sedlacek, 1989; Washton & Gold, 1986). However, the incidence rates of beer and hard liquor have not changed over a ten-year period (1973 and 1983), and as high as a 90% incidence rate has been reported among freshmen (Carter & Sedlacek, 1989).

There are also gender differences in drug use. Overall, males tended to have higher incidence rates than females in the 1970s. For example, a study done by Howard and Sedlacek (1975) provided evidence that freshman males more often used marijuana, cocaine, and beer than freshman females, while females used speed more often. Furthermore, over a three year period (1972-74), Fago and Sedlacek (1975) found that an overall general trend was an increase in drug use for freshman women, and a somewhat stable rate of incidence for freshman men. Studies have indicated that in the 1980s, gender differences in drug usage are lessening, and that women are using drugs more often than before. In general, women appear to have used more alcohol and marijuana in recent years (Lester & Leach, 1983). Furthermore, freshman women at a university were more likely to smoke cigarettes and drink wine than freshman men (Carter & Sedlacek, 1989). Lester and Leach

(1983) found that there were no significant differences between male and female marijuana use in 1980 and 1970.

Currently, one of the major drug problems centers upon the growing use and abuse of cocaine. Since the early 70s, the number of people trying cocaine has significantly increased. For instance, 5.4 million in 1974 had tried cocaine, while 21.6 million had tried the same drug in 1982 (Adams, Gfroerer, Rouse, & Kozel, 1986). Young adults are the predominant group who use cocaine. Carter and Sedlacek (1989) showed that there was an increase in incidence (from 8% to 14%) among university freshmen between 1973 and 1983. However, more recently, the annual percentage rate for cocaine has fallen from 17% to 10% between 1986 and 1988 (Johnston, O'Malley, & Bachman, in press).

Moreover, cocaine appears to be widely used by many different segments of the U.S. population--more women, minority groups, and low income people are using this drug than was the case in the 1970s (Adams et al., 1986; Washton & Gold, 1986). For instance, by 1984 16% of cocaine users either smoked or freebased the drug compared to 1% in 1977 (Adams et al.).

Lastly, college student drug users in the 1980s reflect the similar patterns of rebelliousness and nonconformity that were characteristic of the 1960s drug users. Nicholi, Jr. (1985) suggested that drug users in the 80s, much like those in the 60s, tended to reflect attitudes of nonconformity, discontent, and disaffection with the prevailing social institutions. Similarly, drug users in the 1970s also were perceived as being alienated,

political dissidents, and living markedly different lifestyles (Minatoya & Sedlacek, 1979).

The past research has been somewhat inconsistent in that a variety of different methods and samples have been used. This study will utilize a more controlled methodology--the same university (locale), sampling procedure, and instrument will be used to compare student attitudes and behavior toward drugs from 1978 to 1988.

Method

An anonymous questionnaire was administered to a random sample of 364 incoming freshmen (49% male and 51% female) in 1978, and similarly, to 499 (56% male and 44% female) incoming freshmen in 1988 at a large eastern university. Data were analyzed by chi-square and multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA). All findings reported were significant at the .05 level.

Results

Comparison by year

Incidence. There were 9 substances out of a total of 14 that were significantly different by year. In general, a significantly smaller percentage of students in the 1988 sample indicated that they used these 9 substances once or more (see Table 1). For sake of discussion, the incidence of use of these 9 drugs have been grouped by two categories--relative decline in use (beer, marijuana, and wine) and maintenance of low levels

(cocaine, DMT, downers, hashish, PCP, and speed). Under the first category, the median response for beer was once a week in 1978 versus once a month in 1988. Likewise, there were similar median responses for marijuana and wine--students in 1978 drank wine once a month compared to a few times in 1988. Students in 1978 smoked marijuana a few times versus students in 1988 who indicated that they never smoked.

The second category, maintenance of low levels, included such substances as cocaine. The median response for freshmen who used cocaine in 1978 was a few times compared to freshmen in 1988 whose median response was also a few times. A high percentage of freshmen (see Table 2) in the sample indicated that they have not tried the following drugs (DMT, downers, hashish, PCP, and speed).

Reasons for not using. There were 13 substances that differed significantly by year as to reasons for not using drugs (see Table 3). Generally, across all substances, freshmen in 1978 tended to cite most frequently the following reasons for non-use: reports or experiences of harmful psychological effects, difficult to get, illegality, and interestingly enough, had used it. In comparison, students in 1988 listed the following reasons most often: afraid of addiction, disapproval of parents, and no desire to experience its effects.

A few of the more interesting results were that freshmen in 1978 indicated that they did not use cocaine because it was

psychological effects. However, students in 1988 tended to cite that they were afraid of addiction and observation of its effects on others as reasons for non-use of cocaine.

Reasons for using drugs. Freshman responses to reasons for using drugs were significantly different by year in 9 substances (beer, cocaine, downers, hard liquor, hashish, marijuana, PCP, speed, and wine). Students' reasons for using 5 of these substances (beer, hard liquor, wine, cocaine, and marijuana) were clearly significantly different by year (see Table 4). These 5 drugs, with the exception of cocaine, can be classified as "softer" substances in that they appear to be more popular or readily available than the other more "hard-core" drugs (see Table 4). For instance, Freshmen in 1978 tended to cite the following reasons for drinking beer: in order to get high, relieve anxiety, and to relieve boredom. However, students in 1988 were more apt to drink beer to get drunk or to shut things out.

However, for the other 4 drugs (PCP, speed, downers, hashish) a significantly greater number of students in 1988 than in 1978 indicated that the reason for the use of these 4 substances was that they do not use them (see Table 5).

Age and place where first smoked/drank. Other significant differences by year occurred on age of first use and places where one frequently uses drugs. There appears to be a more restricted range of ages between years when freshmen first drank alcoholic beverages and smoked marijuana. For example, students tended to

first drink alcohol in 1978 at 17 or older, and 10 and under. In contrast, in 1988 students started at 13 or never drank. The same kind of pattern also occurred with smoking marijuana; freshmen in 1978 started at 10 or under, 11, 12, and 13 years, whereas those sampled in 1988 reported that they never smoked or started at age 13. This restricted tendency also is apparent in the places where one does drink or smoke. Freshmen in 1978 tended to drink alcohol in public, in restaurants, or at home, whereas those sampled in 1988 either did not drink or drank at a friend's house. Likewise, students in 1978 smoked marijuana at home or in public or semi-public places, compared to those in 1988 who apparently only smoked at a friend's house.

Comparison by gender: 1978 differences

Incidence. Overall, there were fewer significant differences by gender than by year. In terms of incidence of use, only 2 substances were significantly different by gender in 1978--beer and cigarettes. 96% of the males indicated that they drank beer once or more, in comparison to 92% of the females. The median response for males was once a week, whereas females indicated drinking only once a month. 54% of the males reported smoking cigarettes once or more, compared to 66% of the females. The median response for both males and females was a few times.

Reasons for not using drugs. Only 3 substances (beer, DMT, and LSD) were significantly different by gender in 1978 on reasons for not using. Generally, males tended to cite a greater variety of reasons for non-use across the 3 drugs: use it,

reports of harmful psychological effects, reports of harmful physical effects, illegality, and observation of its effects on others. In contrast, females tended to not indulge in these drugs because they do not like the taste or observation of its effects on others.

For example, in 1978 males tended to not drink beer due to observing its effects on others, or indeed, did drink beer. Females cited not liking the taste as a reason for not drinking.

Reasons for using drugs. Two substances (beer and hard liquor) were significantly different by gender in 1978 according to reasons for using these drugs. Males were more apt to cite the following reasons for drinking beer: get drunk, get high, go along with others, more sociable, and relieve anxiety. However, females seemed to focus on making a good mood last or indicated that they do not drink. Regarding hard liquor, males used the substance to get drunk, go along with others, and to relieve boredom. In contrast, females tended to use hard liquor to get high, make a good mood last, and to relieve anxiety.

Age and place where first smoked/drank. There were no significant differences by gender on age when first used marijuana and the places where it was smoked. However, males and females did differ in the age when they first drank alcohol. Males started drinking alcohol at 12 and 10 years of age, whereas females tended to start at 11 or not drink at all. Moreover, the place where one first drank alcohol was significantly different by gender--it appears that males in 1978 tended to drink more in

public places and at home, whereas females were much more social in that they were more inclined towards drinking at restaurants.

Comparison by gender: 1988 differences

Incidence. For incidence of use, there was only one substance that was significantly different by gender in 1988--again, as in 1978 it was beer. 90% of the males indicated that they drank beer once or more, whereas 89% of females reported the same incidence rate. The median response for drinking beer was once a week for males, and once a month for females.

Reasons for not using drugs. Unlike the 1978 results, there were 12 substances that were significantly different by gender in 1988 (see Table 6) on reasons for not using drugs. Only hard liquor and marijuana were not significantly different by gender in 1988. Generally speaking, the most frequent responses (males) for reasons for not using these 12 drugs were reports/experiences of harmful physical effects, illegality, and afraid of addiction. In contrast, females tended to cite observations of effects on others and no desire as reasons for non-use.

More specifically, in the case of beer, males were more apt to cite reports/experiences of harmful physical effects as a reason for non-use, whereas females indicated that they had no desire, observed its effects on others, and did not like the taste.

Reasons for using drugs. In contrast to the 1978 results, there were no significant differences between gender in the reasons for using drugs.

Age and place where first smoked/drank. Furthermore, there were no significant differences between gender in terms of age when first drank alcohol or smoked marijuana, and the types of places where one frequently drinks or smokes.

Attitudes: Analysis by year and gender

Overall, the results of the MANOVA analysis showed that there were no significant differences in the interaction of year by gender. However, there were significant differences between years and also between gender. Under the year analysis, there were 10 items that were significant (see Table 7). For instance, freshmen in 1988 were less likely to feel marijuana should have the same legal status as alcohol or tobacco than freshmen in 1978. Further, students in 1988 disagreed more that they would drive a car when they were high than students in 1978. Likewise, students in 1988 were less likely to drive a car when drunk than were students in 1978.

There were 4 items that were significantly different on gender (see Table 7). For example, males tended to be more sure of what they wanted to do after graduation, whereas females were more uncertain. In addition, females were less likely to drive a car when drunk than males.

Discussion

Generally, the results of this study seem to indicate that patterns of drug use on this eastern university campus are reflective of the declining trends exhibited nationwide.

Behaviors

Overall, in the midst of the growing conservative climate in this country, there is a significant decline in the use of most drugs among college students. For instance, there was a significant decline in incidence rates of 9 drugs, as well as a greater percentage of students who reported that they have never used certain substances. However, although the incidence rates of alcohol (e.g., beer, wine) did decrease, the percentage of students who used at least once remained relatively high.

Students in 1988 appeared to be more concerned with the addictive qualities of drugs and its deleterious effects than students in 1978. Growing awareness of the effects, as communicated through the media, may be prompting students to take a more serious look at the risks of drug use. Even though drugs are now relatively easier to obtain, students seem to be more hesitant in using these substances--compared to the 1978 sample, students in 1988 started smoking or drinking at a relatively later age, if they have ever tried either substance. Also, drinking alcohol and smoking marijuana in public seems to be less popular; students prefer to drink and smoke in more private settings.

Gender differences also appear to be lessening; there are almost no significant differences between males and females in the rates of drug usage. Only 2 substances in 1978 and 1 substance in 1988 were significantly different by gender in incidence rate--fewer females drank beer and more of the females

smoked cigarettes. Thus, females are using other substances as much as males.

There were significant differences between gender in 1988 for reasons for not using 13 drugs; yet, there were no significant differences for reasons for using drugs. Males and females use drugs in much the same manner, and differ only on their justifications for not indulging in certain substances. It appears that males tended to be more wary of the negative effects of drugs on their bodies (either through reports of others or personal experiences), whereas females seemed to be more concerned with not experiencing what they saw other people go through with drugs.

Attitudes

Overall, students appear to be more conservative and wary of the adverse effects of drug use in 1988 than was the case in 1978. For example, students in 1988 tended to not advocate the legalization of marijuana. Moreover, there were fewer significant differences in attitudes between gender over the ten year period. In general, women were more cautious than men in monitoring their activities when indulging in drugs.

Conclusion

There appear to be several implications for student affairs professionals. First, the results of this study suggest that freshman drug use is down, and that more programs could build on this assumption. That is, an alarmist or crisis approach to

programming may be less useful than one that treats drug-use as one of the decisions facing students. Students appear to be headed in a positive direction in regards to drug use. Therefore, it may be more productive for student affairs professionals to emphasize that positive direction, rather than call for new directions.

Second, another conclusion from this study is that differential programming may be called for; by substance and gender. Freshmen use or do not use different substances for different reasons, and these vary by gender as well. For example, females often did not use a given substance due to their observation of effects of the substance on others, whereas males tended to express a fear of becoming addicted. Gender-focused orientation or counseling programs could base their approaches on these different motives.

Third, an effective program might need to be focused on a specific drug, rather than on overall appeal. Freshmen relate to drugs in different ways. For instance, fear of addiction is a student concern with cocaine, whereas parental approval and fear of physical effects were the major concerns with marijuana. Successful programs would benefit by incorporating this information. To be even more specific, given the time and resources of most programs it may be necessary to select certain substances to be focused on. Those that seem to be a larger problem or issue on a given campus could be given a priority.

A final point is that attitudes and behavior toward drugs are complicated and multivariate issues for freshmen. Causes and effects are not always clear. However, with better information through such studies as this, student affairs professionals should be better able to develop those links and be effective helpers to freshmen who are working through drug-related issues.

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TABLE 1

Incidence Rates by Year: Percent of Sample Who Used Substance Once or More*

Substance	1978 %	1988 %
Beer	94	89
Cocaine	14	6
DMT	4	.2
Downers	13	4
Hashish	34	14
Marijuana	61	45
PCP	17	1
Speed	15	6
Wine	92	81

*Differences significant using chi-square at .05

TABLE 2

Incidence of Use: Percent of Sample Who Never Used Drugs*

Substance	1978 %	1988 %
DMT	96	100
Downers	87	96
Hashish	67	86
PCP	83	99
Speed	85	94

*Differences significant using chi-square at .05

TABLE 3

Reasons for Not Using Drugs by Year

Substance*	1978	1988
Cigarettes	N.C.P.	no desire; afraid of addiction
Cocaine	difficult to get; harmful psychological effects	afraid of addiction; observations of effects
Marijuana	don't like taste	disapproval of parents harmful physical effects
DMT	illegality; harmful psychological effects	afraid of addiction
Downers	harmful psychological effects	afraid of addiction
Hard liquor	illegality; harmful psychological effects	don't like taste; afraid of addiction
Hashish	difficult to get; don't like taste	afraid of addiction
Heroin	harmful psychological effects	no desire
LSD	difficult to get	disapproval of parents
Mescaline	difficult to get; illegality; harmful psychological effects	afraid of addiction
PCP	illegality; harmful physical effects; harmful psychological effects;	afraid of addiction; no desire
Speed	harmful psychological effects; illegality	N.C.P.
Wine	harmful psychological effects	don't like taste; afraid of addiction; no desire; disapproval of parents; illegality

Note. N.C.P. refers to no clear pattern in the data
*Differences significant using chi-square at .05

TABLE 4

Reasons for Drug Use by Year

Substance*	1978	1988
Beer	get high; relieve anxiety; relieve boredom	get drunk; shut things out
Hard liquor	get high/feel good; go along w/others; relieve anxiety; make good mood last; feel depressed/sad	get drunk
Wine	get high; relieve anxiety	experience things more vividly
Cocaine	get high; experience more vividly	do not use
Marijuana	get high; go along w/others, make good mood last longer; relieve anxiety; relieve boredom	enjoy doing illegal activity

*Differences significant using chi-square at .05

TABLE 5

Reasons for Using Drugs: Percent of Sample that Indicated They Do Not Use Drugs*

Substance	1978 %	1988 %
PCP	96	99
Speed	90	98
Downers	94	98
Hashish	75	92

TABLE 6

Reasons for Not Using Drugs by Gender: 1988

Substances*	Males	Females
Beer	harmful physical effects	no desire; observed effects on others; did not like taste
Cigarettes	disapproval of parents; harmful physical effects	did not like taste
Cocaine	afraid of addiction; illegality; harmful physical effects	no desire; observed effects on others
DMT	afraid of addiction; harmful physical effects; illegality	observed effects on others
Downers	afraid of addiction; harmful physical effects	N.C.P.
Hashish	illegality; harmful physical effects; harmful psychological effects	no desire; observed effects on others
Heroin	afraid of addiction; illegality; harmful physical effects	observed effects on others
LSD	afraid of addiction; illegality; harmful physical effects	no desire; observed effects on others
Mescaline	afraid of addiction; illegality; harmful physical effects; harmful psychological effects	no desire; difficult to get; observed effects on others
PCP	afraid of addiction; illegality; harmful physical effects	observed effects on others
Speed	afraid of addiction; illegality; harmful physical effects	observed effects on others; harmful psychological effects
Wine	harmful physical effects; don't like taste	no desire; observation of effects

Note. N.C.P. refers to no clear pattern in the data
*Differences significant using chi-square at .05

TABLE 7

Means* and Standard Deviations on Attitude Items: By Year and Gender

Item	1978 Men Mean	1978 Men SD	1978 Women Mean	1978 Women SD	1988 Men Mean	1988 Men SD	1988 Women Mean	1988 Women SD	Differences Significant**
1. use of marijuana should have same legal status as use of alcohol or tobacco	2.81	1.41	2.56	1.23	3.56	1.21	3.71	1.13	Y
2. I would like to have just about same kind of life for myself as my parents have had	3.46	1.09	3.60	1.00	3.11	1.14	3.20	1.19	Y
3. I don't know exactly what I want to do after graduating from college	3.35	1.25	3.12	1.25	3.40	1.23	3.28	1.29	G
4. My parents drink alcoholic beverages	2.49	1.26	2.54	1.32	2.70	1.29	2.79	1.28	Y
5. I expect to live a life style similar to my parents	3.27	1.21	3.39	1.11	3.14	1.10	2.91	1.16	Y
6. My parents smoke marijuana	4.56	1.09	4.64	.9	4.78	.69	4.73	.8	Y
7. I sometimes feel anxious about suceeding in college	1.88	.94	1.90	.93	2.07	.91	1.95	.90	Y
8. I usually do more work in classes than is required to get by	3.02	1.12	2.91	1.20	3.15	1.06	2.95	1.13	G

TABLE 7 (continued)

Means* and Standard Deviations on Attitude Items: By Year and Gender

	1978				1988				
	Men		Women		Men		Women		Differences
Item	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Significant**
9. I expect to feel a sense of belonging and identification here	2.38	1.00	2.26	.96	2.24	.75	2.12	.88	Y
10. College is a practical matter; with degree can pursue career goals	2.39	1.12	2.49	1.12	2.34	.99	2.55	1.10	G
11. I expect to maintain a B average	1.95	.98	1.89	.82	1.73	.82	1.70	.70	Y
12. On more than one occasion I have driven a car when high	3.57	1.68	3.80	1.49	4.50	1.12	4.54	1.07	Y
13. On more than one occasion I have driven a car when drunk	3.15	1.69	3.60	1.53	3.99	1.42	4.24	1.26	G, Y

*1=strongly agree, 5=strongly disagree
**significant at .05 level using multivariate analysis of variance
Y=year; G=gender; YxG=interaction